

## "GRANDMOTHERS WERE MY TRIBAL GODS": AN ECOFEMINIST READING OF LINDA HOGAN'S *THE BOOK OF MEDICINES*

SAYED SADEK

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Port Said University, Egypt

Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Arts, Taif University, Saudi Arabia

### ABSTRACT

Linda Hogan's works are usually connected to environmental and feminist causes as she repeatedly demonstrates that there is a special spiritual union between women and the vulnerable elements of nature such as animals and plants. This paper studies Hogan's *The Book of Medicines* using ecofeminist lenses in order to decipher the strategies used by the poet to give voice to the silenced humans and nonhumans. Hogan's book focuses on the direct relationship between the victimization of women and nature as a result of colonization. Through her poems, she seeks to draw upon wisdom from nature and from female powers of regeneration. Hogan manages to break the barriers between humans and non-humans as she has placed women, animals, and plants in a very respectable status and focused on the central role of women in Indian American society in uniting the endangered biosphere, their interrelatedness with the earth, and their role as creators and nurturers of earth and each other.

**KEYWORDS:** Linda Hogan, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Native American Poetry

### INTRODUCTION

Linda Hogan (1947- ), a Native American poet, novelist, essayist, and activist, is widely regarded as one of the most influential and provocative figures in the contemporary American literary landscape. Through her works, she has distinguished herself as a political ideologist and an environmental theorist. Her representation of the human experience centers on the concept that all life is interconnected. Her poetry focuses on twentieth-century Native American life, as well as issues concerning women, nature, the global environment, identity, and tribal history. Hogan's works are linked to eco-criticism, eco-feminism, and environmental justice. In her poems, she frequently demonstrates that there is a special communion between women, nature and the animal world.

Ecofeminism is an activist movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. The term "ecofeminism" springs from the belief that there are strong connections between the domination of nature and the domination of women in contemporary society. Ecofeminists believe that an exploration and understanding of these connections is the first step to stop the various forms of oppression that target the vulnerable beings.

Bina Agarwal (1992) identifies four major precepts in ecofeminism. First, ecofeminists are unified in the exploration of the commonalities between gender oppression and environmental degradation mainly caused by male Western dominance. Second, men are more related to culture as women are more related to environment. Third, the oppression of women and nature has occurred simultaneously, and thus women have a responsibility to cease male domination over both. Finally, ecofeminism seeks to combine feminism and ecological thought, as they both work towards creating egalitarian, non-hierarchical structures (p.120).

The aim of this article is to interpret Hogan's poetry from an ecofeminist perspective. It attempts to explore the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world as well as to investigate Hogan's activist and environmentalist attitude by exploring the connections between the domination of nature and the domination of women in her collection: *The Book of Medicines*. In addition, this article focuses on Hogan's emphasis on the central role of women in Native American society in defending the endangered biosphere, their interrelatedness with the earth, and their role as creators and sustainers of the earth. It also sheds light on Hogan's deep ecological notion that women's close contact with the earth results in their integration with nature. The article follows Hogan's spiritual strategies to challenge the power structures of the colonial west in order to discover the new techniques she devised to heal wronged women and nature.

*The Book of Medicines* is an activist text that champions the rights of the oppressed creatures in order to reconsider the relationships between men and women and between humans and non-humans as well as to put an end to the degradation of women that has accompanied the humiliation of nature. This book centers on the author's ecofeminist philosophy as it reveals her belief in the major role played by women in embracing the environment in their position as caretakers. Women, she feels, have a natural affinity for this role because "they are biologically designed to be the bearers of life." In McNally's words, the poems in this volume "function as prayers, therapeutic and rhythmic incantations through which humans may begin to find the spiritual strength to heal the earth from its damaged state" [McNallyhttp://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/hoganLinda.php](http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/hoganLinda.php)

Hogan believes that "Women and Indians are often equated with animals, in ways that have negative connotations for all three" (qtd. in Alaimo, 1996, p. 58). The crisis of ecofeminism stems from the habit of considering women as part of the landscape and therefore should be manipulated. Many of Hogan's poems in the *Book of Medicines* reveal the conflict between those who connect with the land and those who seek to control it. She makes use of water imagery so as to serve her ecofeminist agenda.

In "Hunger," she emphasizes the joint subjugation of women and the environment. The poem is situated in a historical context that enables the speaker to tell of the beginnings of the colonial settlements that ultimately brought about American Indian cultural genocide, and carried with it patriarchal practices enforced by a belief in a divinely ordained mission to dominate and subjugate the "new world" (Dreese, 1999, p.15). The image of the colonizers hungering after the riches of water is vividly drawn by Hogan:

Hunger crosses oceans

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It sits on the ship and cries

It fashioned hooks to catch

The passing songs of whales so large

The men grew small. (Hogan 17)

In these lines, the savage imperialists seek to silence the elements of nature represented by the whales. They can never appreciate the beauty of the songs chanted by these sea creatures. The main concern of such people is to control everything around them. They are ready to crush nature physically and spiritually. While the whales are described as large, the colonizers are minute little creatures with no value.

As the poem proceeds, Hogan compares the exploitation of dolphins to the maltreatment of women. It is a

principal tenet of all trends of ecofeminism that varieties of oppression, especially the oppression of women and nature, are interconnected. Men at sea hunger for women in the form of dolphins as they believe that both of these are helpless creatures easy to manipulate.

Hunger was the fishermen

Who said dolphins are like women

We took them from the sea

And had our way with them. (Hogan 17)

Hogan's language conjures up images of violent sexual conquest. "The men specifically compare the sea creatures to women, and in their arrogance despoil them as they would a woman" (Cagle, 2006, p. 85). Linking the abuse of women to that of the dolphins and the sea suggests that the same "ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender" also "sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment" (Sturgeon, 1997, p. 23).

Man's hunger for the exploitation of the earth is motivated by economic greed. "The standard history of colonialism," according to Gaard (1997), is "one in which the oppressive structures of capitalism, Christianity, and patriarchy construct nature, and in which those associated with nature are considered resources for the colonizer, means to his ends, interesting only in terms of their subordination" (p.12).

The poem evokes the image of colonial settlers crossing the sea in search of that which will satisfy them. Thus, in this poem women are connected to both helpless sea creatures and Native Americans. All three species are exposed to endless oppression. Hogan attempts to challenge Western constructs, but "with an ecofeminist activism that brings together women and water imagery to expose male exploitation of women and nature on an aquatic terrain. Social activism is "drawn from sources of spirit and mystery where injustices committed against women and the non-human natural world are addressed" (Dreese, p. 7).

Ecofeminism seeks to recognize the interconnectedness between elements of nature and fight these injustices; as Gaard suggests: "ecofeminism approaches the problems of environmental degradation and social injustice from the premise that how we treat nature and how we treat each other are inseparably linked" (qtd in Alaimo, 2000, p. 10). Therefore, it is the duty of all people, particularly women, to defend the environment against the attacks and violations of people who have no respect for non-humans. Moreover, women should learn the art of resistance from the dolphin in order to save themselves as well as the other helpless elements of nature.

In the second part of the poem, Hogan uses maternal metaphors to emphasize the consequences of the abuse of women and of other forms of life. The sexual acts committed by the men upon the dolphins point to the aggressive attitude towards female beings, whether human or nonhuman. The enemy of nature is not a young man this time but an old man who wants to rob all resources of nature. The sea is represented as the figure of a bountiful, pregnant woman who is fertile and unaware as the men approach at night waiting to draw from her that which she nurtures:

It is the old man

Who comes in the night

To cast a line

And wait at the luminous shore

He knows the sea is pregnant  
 With clear fish  
 And their shallow pools of eggs. (Hogan 17)

The rapacious old man insists on depriving the sea of its very essence of fertility and regenerative powers. This is another evidence of the extent to which the creative possibilities of feminine beings have been manipulated to serve the avaricious needs of the colonizing men.

Hogan laments the degree to which the abilities of women, animals, and the land itself to provide one another with shelter, nurture, and sustenance have been undermined by the shameless acts of violence, degradation, and exploitation that inevitably accompany colonialism and capitalism (Cagle, p. 89). There is also an implied comparison between old men and old women in the poem. While the old man captures innocent sea creatures, old women are merciful life-givers interested in healing wounds and providing therapy for the sick as will be shown in the "Grandmother Songs" later on in this article. Thus, neither young men nor old men care about the future of the environment. Both types of men keep exploiting the resources and the riches of the environment for their own benefit. The old man in the poem is described as a thief-colonizer robbing the sea belongings in the dead of night. Another example of this patriarchal assault on women and the land is in the poem "Harvesters of Night and Water." It begins with the image of men out on a boat in the middle of the ocean fighting to capture a resistant octopus. The merciless men (read colonizers) exert their utmost effort to destroy nature in order to imprison the free creatures with "impotent nets/ limp as poverty/ that when it ends/ takes more than it needs" (22). They behave like thieves who only appear at night to conquer and devastate all beauties around them:

In midnight  
 The circle of light in the boat  
 Is filled with men and white arms  
 With ropes moving like promise  
 And nets pulling up the black and icy waters. (Hogan 22)

It should be noted here that while the boat and the men are described as white (Europeans), positive colors of beauty are used to refer to the sea creatures:

A blue crab, tender inside its shell,  
 A star from another night of darkness than ours,  
 A glass-eyed halibut. (Hogan 22)

The men keep shooting, screaming, and terrifying the tender sea creatures in order to get what they need. Hogan depicts the verbal violence that often accompanies humans' forays into animal-inhabited terrains. The fishermen in the poem, who roughly attempt to haul an octopus into their boat, are unable to listen to the subtler language of this sea creature (Love, 2003, p. 82). Hogan demonstrates "the imbrications of the cultural invasion and colonization suffered by Native people with the invasion and colonization of land" (Beadling, 2007, p. 82). In her mind, the oppressions suffered by natives, women, and the land are usually connected.

At last, the octopus fights back the forces of evil that conspire to take it away from its eternal habitat and defeats all of them:

Its many arms  
Fight hard, hold fast and tight  
Against the held boat,  
In struggle with air and men. (Hogan 22)

The men insist on capturing the octopus with their grappling hooks for economic benefit as "it will sell for two hundred dollars,/ it will be cut into pieces...and used again" (23). The octopus finally manages to escape by the skin of its teeth. Again, the description of the octopus stands in sharp contrast with its enemies. While the enemies appear in the dark, scream violently, use weapons of destruction and confinement, and hunger after wealth, the octopus appears at daybreak, shines like the sun, and looks as beautiful as an angel, its arms resembling "those of four mothers" (24).

Although the octopus is represented as silent, "perhaps silenced (the fishermen seem to drown out any sounds it might make), the female narrator expresses a desire to communicate the complexities of its life to the fishermen" (Love, p. 83). The speaker who watches the events in the poem is sorrowful for the violent and cruel manner in which the men attempt to catch the octopus:

I want to tell them what I know,  
That this life collects coins  
Like they do  
And builds walls on the floor of the sea. (Hogan 23)

The fishermen cannot recognize "the verbal and nonverbal connections between themselves and the nonhuman, sea-dwelling creature they are struggling to claim and kill" (Love, p. 83). Only a wise woman can lecture and school such ruthless fishers on how to appreciate the beauty of nature. This passage reveals the frustration Hogan experiences in wanting others to respect and value living creatures other than humans. She wants to heal the gap the dominant culture has placed between humans and nature by telling the men that "the sea creature lives its life to survive as they do. The octopus saves valuables for future use and builds its home" (Dreese, p. 17). The silent desperation to remain in balance with our natural environment is "a need understood and shared by generations of mothers in Hogan's work" (Smith, 2003, p. 129). Hogan ends the poem with this stanza which is presented as a declaration:

I want the world to be kinder  
I am a woman  
I am afraid.  
I saw a star once, falling toward me.  
It was red with brilliant arms  
And then it was gone. (Hogan 24)

Hogan's call for a kinder world is echoed by the vanishing falling red star, which may symbolize the strength and brilliance of Native cultures. As a woman, she is aware that there is much to be afraid of. The harvesters of the night can kill and exploit women in the same manner as they brutally attack the octopus. This disrespect for other forms of life has created a vicious world in Hogan's view. "The men who are harvesting the night in the seas that she navigates in her poetry

fail to acknowledge and respect sea creatures that surround them" (Montgomery, 2009, p. 139).

In this sense, Hogan seems to agree with Merchant's "partnership ethic" which means that:

Nature is not below us, as something to be dominated and controlled, nor is Nature above us. Instead we interact with Nature as an equal in a relationship of give and take. Our relationship with Nature is embedded in a dynamic tension between humanity and the natural world. (Merchant, 1995, p. 10)

This poem again charges women specifically with the responsibility of nurturing the natural world. For Hogan, the animate universe "not only mothers and sustains women, but it is also inextricably connected to them. If the earth is depleted of its resources, denied voice, and robbed of regenerative capacities, so too are women" (Cagle, p. 32).

In "The Fallen," Hogan again explores the deterioration of maternal images into those associated with dissolution, this time using the image of the Native animal. The poem is a kind of meditation on the wolf's symbolic role in Indian cultures:

In our astronomy,  
The Great Wolf  
Lived in sky It was the mother of all women  
And howled her daughter's names  
Into the winds of night. (Hogan 42)

The Great Wolf "watches over the earth like a mother over a daughter and sings songs of healing and nurture" (Cagle, p. 91). Thus the speaker describes the wolf in very intimate terms, regarding it as a sincere maternal figure or a relative. However, unfortunately, "the new people" looked down upon the wolf and regarded it as something to be feared and eradicated when it came too close to human life. The poem emphasizes that once the balance between human life and the natural world is lost, it becomes impossible to restore. New mythologies, whether "science" or "story," treat the wolf as a devil rather than a mother, ignoring the capacity of the wolf's song to heal (Smith, pp. 130-31).

In their science,  
Wolf was not the mother.  
Wolf was not wind  
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In their stories  
Wolf was the devil  
-----God's Lucifer. (Hogan 42)

Instead of viewing the wolf as a mother, a guardian of human daughters, Euro-American society has perverted the image until it has come to suggest danger, not protection.

The speaker cannot return the severed relationship between humans and the natural world as the new people seem to have cut off all connections with regenerative forces. "The swollen belly", a symbol often associated with pregnancy, becomes an image not of rebirth but of aborted promise. Its enlargement also recalls the swelling caused by extreme malnutrition. The "dried up nipples of a hungry world" (43) cannot provide the sustenance and nourishment needed to

sustain life. These feminine, maternal images have again been fully transformed into images of devastation, starvation, and sterility" (Cagle, pp. 92-93).

In her poem "Milk," Hogan draws a strong line of connection between humans and animals. She identifies her mother with the female cattle who produces milk to feed all. Milking the cattle reminds her of her mother's milk that used to feed everybody:

Of cattle, nipples just washed,  
Brought in from the field.  
I remember the smell of my mother's milk,  
The taste of beginnings,  
When she was food for another child.  
I am a body  
Grown from nipple,  
From when we were  
Sharers of the same body. (Hogan 50)

This is a vivid description of the golden days of the past, when mothers, whether human or non-human, used to receive all kinds of appreciation and veneration from those around them for the limitless matrimonial services they provide. But this kind of treatment has been replaced by the most merciless behavior of the new people. The cattle are no longer fed as in the past, and they are manipulated by the colonizers whose main concern is to get as much milk as possible out of the hungry animals.

They were hungry,  
With angled bones  
Poking through the darkness  
Where they stood  
... weakened. (Hogan 50)

The businessmen of modern times never care a penny for the ill health of the animals and keep them in very poor conditions.

And the milk sellers  
Hoisting up the dying  
Thirsty cow  
Too weak to stand  
In leather straps and milking death,  
Drinking its watery milk,  
Eating land,

They were hungry. (Hogan 50-51)

Thus, gone are the days when mothers received the best kind of care and were deified by society. The new spirit of the age has dehumanized the motherhood of both animals and humans, and therefore cannot find any sort of connection with spiritual life.

"Like the spirits, springs, and trees, women too have stories that have been silenced" (Cagle, p. 72). Hogan's marginal view of the world does not divide it into binary oppositions in conflict with each other. On the contrary, "it finds the bridges, even across species, and creates a vision of the world in which there is a fabric, a dependent relation between things. And in this kind of interconnected, complex world, alliances are possible" (Averbach, 2000, pp. 70-71). Ecofeminists advocate a combination of women's movement with the ecological movement since women and nature have undergone a similar experience - being dominated by men.

These philosophical views are reflected in "Bamboo" which tells the story of a plant that has been divorced by males from its natural regenerative cycle and become a tool associated with the atrocious acts of war. The poem opens with the speaker making a daughterly reclamation of the bamboo. Recognizing in it the origins of women, the speaker imaginatively embraces bamboo as part of her own kin:

First Woman was made of slender bones

Like these that stand upright together

In the rich, green world of daylight. (Hogan 36)

Having established a familial bond with the plant, the speaker starts a metaphoric sisterhood; the bamboo becomes a "forest / of sisters" (36). Just as the bodies of women resemble the slender stalks of the plant, the sounds of the bamboo are also reminiscent of the voices of women (Cagle, p. 90). At night, they "talk in the clattering breeze / as if each is an open throat, rising / to speak" (Hogan 36). The stalks stretching skyward stir the speaker, and she desires to share their beauty with a male friend. She details to him the many aspects of beauty in the plant that relate him to women. But, the man, as usual in Hogan's poetry, would use the plant for something else:

I tell a man about this beautiful

Creaking world, how it flowers all

At once. He has been to war. He says

With bamboo they do terrible things

To men and women. (Hogan 36)

Though the speaker associates the sister stalks with strength and regeneration, the man can no longer do so. He is unable to appreciate the "breeze" of the plant and would therefore turn it into a weapon of violence against humanity.

Having overcome the shock of what she heard, the speaker looks again at the bamboo and considers the new image presented to her. Having connected herself and her gender with the sister stalks, she is angry for the unexpected shameful transformation of the plant "from beautiful, singing, and regenerative to hostile, silenced, and even fatal." Furthermore, because the men of war cannot hear and do not acknowledge the voice of the bamboo, "its vitality has been cut away from it in a manner that disregards any form of resistance the bamboo may have waged. It is exploited as if it were an inanimate object" (Cagle, p. 90).



The female speaker, recognizing that the same silencing that has befallen the bamboo may also affect her, stands firm for the bamboo, and by implication, for herself. Hogan writes, the bamboo

... Did not give permission to soldiers.

It is imprisoned in its own skin.

The stalks are restless about this.

They have lived too long in the world of men.

They are hollow inside.

Lord, are you listening to this?

Plants are climbing to heaven

To talk to you. (Hogan 36)

Denied recognition as alive and storied creations, the sister plants find themselves locked up in their own skins. They cannot break the barriers or fill the huge gap made by the men of war between themselves and humans because they are denied their interconnectedness with other living forms. Their voices have been silenced by a world of men who have abused and exploited them. The helpless plants that represent women resort to heaven as a final hope so that they might be listened to.

Hogan believes that the established forms of feminine empowerment expressed in and safeguarded by these relationships have been displaced and devalued by a male-dominated, Euro-American society intent upon distorting what should be an equal association between humans and other forms of creation into a one based upon domination, exploitation, and greed. It is pity that the evils of colonialism and capitalism have cut all kinds of relationships between humans and non-humans.

Many Native American feminists see the way out of the dismal situation of contemporary Native American women in going back to the past and reviving the power of women. As Paula Gunn Allen (1992) asserts, "the root of oppression is loss of memory" ( p. 213). For her, the direct way to resist is to remember. The past, hidden in memories and mythological stories shared by story-telling, has the power to change or reshape the present dismal state. This concept of the "healing power" of the past has its roots in the historical fact that in Native American tribes, women were "highly valued, both respected and feared, and all social institutions reflected this attitude" (Gunn Allen, p. 212).

Many of Hogan's poems bear witness to the various experiences of maternal disempowerment. They describe the loss of power and esteem held in formerly matrilineal societies and the difficulty in fulfilling their traditional roles as transmitters of culture (Cagle, p. 18). Hogan's poetry speaks through the voice of women, emphasizing the importance of their role as culture bearers. Feminist implications are also evident in Hogan's representation of spirituality since "she often presents the female role as central in the practice and passing down of Native traditions and ceremonies" (Riggs, 2008, p. 149). Her work repeatedly portrays women as spiritual custodians as well as the primary means by which long-held customs and tribal wisdom are passed down to younger generations.

In the following extracts from "The Grandmother Songs," Hogan deifies the role of grandmothers in their songs and in blood, portraying them not only as traditional "tribal gods" but also as central nurturers:

The grandmothers were my tribal gods.

They were there

When I was born. Their songs

Rose out of wet labor

And the woman smell of birth. (Hogan 57)

As soon as the child sees the first light in the world, the first people it sets eyes on are the grandmothers and the first sounds are those of their ancestral songs, hence they school the child in the fundamentals of Native identity.

The "grandmother songs" also imbue women with the power to gain access to "the mother of water" in the earth, notably also female in gender:

In those days, through song,

A woman could fly

To the mother of water

And fill her ladle

With cool springs of earth.

She could fly to the deer

And sing him down to the ground.

Song was the pathway where people met

And animals crossed. (Hogan 57)

The songs empowered women to shape the identity of the new born babes and take them by hand on their first steps towards Native American citizenship:

They made a shape around me,

A grandmother's embrace,

The shawl of family blood

That was their song for kinship. (Hogan 57)

Ultimately, song is the most favorable way of communication between animals and humans. There are different types of songs according to the related occasions:

There was a divining song

For finding the lost,

And a raining song. (Hogan 57)

For Hogan, it is the old women who have preserved connections with tradition even though they have witnessed and experienced a great deal of change. Her unique awareness of history is generally universal, rooted in ecology as well as in revealing the most intimate moments of spiritual union with the earth and the maternal ancestors.

Hogan celebrates a connectedness that can reestablish bonds with nature and with elements of heritage important to both the individual and the community. She remembers the glorious history of grandmothers. In these poems we listen to a woman in touch with the wisdom of older women and their enduring spirits, a woman who insists on teaching younger generations the traditional ways of life. Remembering old history is regarded as a sort of healing:

And when our fingers and voices met,

The song

Of an older history came through

My mouth. (Hogan 58)

Much of Hogan's work focuses on Native communities and their connection to nature, spirituality, and cultural identity. She is also an active environmentalist whose work reflects environmental and social-feminist issues.

Through the memories

Of loves and faces.

The embrace opens

And grandmothers pass,

Wearing sunlight. (Hogan 58)

The elder women also remind younger women, often represented by the figure of the poet-speaker as a younger girl or woman, of elements of the self it is vital not to lose (Smith, p. 132):

..... The grandmothers

Keep following the creation

That opens before them

As they sing. (Hogan 58)

"Partings" is another poem that focuses on the forgotten exceptional abilities of women in the past, especially those of Native communities and their connection to nature, spirituality, and cultural identity. Hogan gives a definition of mother and child: "This is what it means to be mother and child,/ to wear the skin of ancestors" (71). She goes on to detail some of the major requirements needed of any Native American to pass the belonging test: "trust in the strange science of healing./ Believe the medicine of your own hand" (71). She ends the poem by reminding people of modern times of the major role old women of the golden past used to play in native communities:

Think of the midwife

Whose knife made two lives

Where there was only one.

She had mastered the way

Of beautiful partings. (Hogan 71)

Thus, contrary to the men who are represented in Hogan's poems as killers of life and the environment, the midwife's creative work is compared to that of Prophet Moses who cut a path for himself and his followers in the middle of water. Hogan travels back in history when a midwife rather than a doctor used to help pregnant women give birth. Though a knife is sharp, the sympathetic midwife turns it into a tender instrument that brings a new child to life. This seems in sharp contrast with the men who turned the peaceful plant into a war weapon in the "Bamboo" poem.

Finally, in her poem "Gather," we are given an account of what the mother learned from her grandmothers in order to pass this kind of knowledge to the younger generations. Referring to her mother, the speaker says:

She was a faith healer, of sorts.

By that, she always held a cure

For hopelessness, could lay a hand

On misery and make it smile. (Hogan 73)

Thus, mother is taught by grandmother to be a healer of wounds and broken hearts. Even in hard, melancholic times, the hope of Native American women is born anew. It is only by memory and hope that they are able to survive.

The importance of the woman-line and role of culture bearer is also tied to a woman's body in "Drum" where Hogan assumes the voice of authenticity and authority of a culture bearer as she describes "the conditions and motions of a child still in its mother's womb that becomes symbolic of the tribal past and the heartbeat of the earth" (Montgomery, p. 187). Hogan writes:

Inside the dark human waters

Of our mothers,

Inside the blue drum of skin

That beat the slow song of our tribes

We knew the drifts of continents

And moving tides. (Hogan 69)

The poem is ultimately concerned with the survival of Native people and the ancient pull to stay connected to the tribal past as the poem's speaker refers to the different types of torture endured by Native Americans:

We are the people who left water

To enter a dry world.

We have survived soldiers and drought,

Survived hunger

And living

Inside the unmapped terrain

Of loneliness.

That is why we have thirst. (Hogan 69)

Hogan's poem suggests that just as a baby is firmly embedded in its mother's womb before birth, so the desire to stay connected to the traditions, stories, and rituals of the past are historically embedded within Native American people. The Native people were able to overcome the problems resulting from their forced removal from the lands of abundance to the regions of abject poverty. "The skin of the womb becomes the skin of ancient tribal drums; the mother's heartbeat echoing both the earth's rhythm and the beat of tribal drums" (Montgomery, p. 188). In this sense, the woman's body also becomes a metaphor for the healed earth representing a spiritual journey that connects back to the origins of Native Americans and perhaps to people all over the world.

Rainwater (1999) argues that "Native Americans emphasize collective existence and psychic connection" (p. 93). The Indians succeed as they survive despite the immense killing conspiracy surrounding them. As they re-establish a communal link to the past, they create a future for themselves. Similarly, women can survive the endless attacks by men only if they are united with the other wronged elements of nature. The collective identity is also highlighted in the poem as there is a high frequency of the pronoun "we" rather than "I" throughout the poem. "I" for Hogan is never an independent entity telling an isolated story of selfhood; it is always connected to a "we" - to a family, a culture, a history, a natural environment" (Oubre, 2000, p. 125).

The voices projected in Hogan's poems are infused with a sense of the traditional, historical past as it relates to the modern world. Her poetry also repeatedly "draws upon intimate experiences common to all women such as childbirth and family issues. This combination of voices frequently draws upon the importance of the woman-line" (Montgomery, p. 178). Hogan seeks to reconnect and maintain the voices of authority of the ancient grandmothers who told the tales of ancient ceremonies as well as the dreadful stories of the sufferings endured by the Native Americans during the periods of forced relocation and assimilation. The truth for her is "a mixture of Indian tribal wisdom and female spirituality." Hogan "has written the formula for a cure" and her poems "give birth to a neo-Earth motherism" (Selman, 1993, p. 38).

In this article, we have explored Hogan's lifetime project of defending the vulnerable beings, especially animals, plants, and women, as reflected in her *Book of Medicines*. Hogan engages her spirituality as a catalyst in her writing as she gives a detailed account of the various kinds of oppression directed to humans and non-humans so as to draw people's attention to these violations and try to correct them. Hogan's poems are deeply introspective and are significant for her use of maternal metaphors where she seeks to revitalize all women's energies in an attempt to restore their roles as spiritual healers and custodians of the universe.

Hogan's feminist philosophy is interconnected with her Native American and ecological beliefs. She acts as a custodian by writing poetry that focuses on the injustices committed against her gender, her culture, and the environment. Her poems reflect her multiple identities: a Native American, a social activist, an environmentalist, and an ecofeminist. The poems also blend the personal with the collective and the "I" in her poems can be an equivalent of "We." Hogan's poems can thus be regarded as lectures on how to respect, appreciate, celebrate, and embrace the beauty and the richness of the natural world. They function as prescriptions for spiritual healing.

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### **Short Author Biography**

Sayed Sadek got his Ph. D. in English poetry from Cairo University in 2004. He teaches English literature and literary Criticism at Suez Canal University, Port Said University, and Misr University for Science and Technology in Egypt, and at Taif University in Saudi Arabia. He has published papers in African literature and Native American poetry.

